

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 HEW-02 SIL-01 LAB-04 EB-07 MED-02 AID-05 PC-01

/077 W

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R 171605Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4080

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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BOGOTA FOR REGIONAL MEDICAL ADVISOR

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SWEL, EC

SUBJECT: GOE AVERTS NATIONWIDE DOCTORS'S STRIKE

1. SUMMARY: GOE HAS SUCCEEDED IN AVERTING NATIONWIDE DOCTORS' STRIKE ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 16. ALTHOUGH DOCTORS' DEMANDS WERE FOR ALLOCATION OF ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENTAL RESOURCES TO COUNTRY'S MEDICAL INSTALLATIONS AND MEDICAL PROFESSION, IMPLEMENTATION OF STRIKE COULD HAVE HAD STRONG POLITICAL IN ADDITION TO PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JANUARY 12 ECUADOR'S MEDICAL FEDERATION, WHICH EMCOMPASSES MOST OF COUNTRY'S 3,200 PHYSICIANS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL PERSONNEL, ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD HOLD NATIONWIDE DOCTORS' STRIKE JANUARY 16 UNLESS GOE MET THREE DEMANDS WHICH HAD BEEN SUBJECT OF OFF-AND-ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH HEALTH MINISTRY DURING PAST THREE YEARS. ALL OF NATION'S MEDICAL FACILITIES, INCLUDING PRIVATE PRACTICES, WOULD HAVE BEEN AFFECTED EXCEPT FOR
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EMERGENCIES.

3. DOCTORS WERE SPECIFICALLY DEMANDING: FIRST, MORE BUDGETARY RESOURCES FROM COUNTRY'S DILAPIDATED HOSPITALS; SECOND, LOWER PRICES FOR MEDICINES, AND, THIRD, A RISE IN THE MINIMUM GUARANTEED SALARY FOR DOCTORS FROM US \$200 TO US \$320 PER MONTH. ON THE FACE OF IT, EACH OF THREE DEMANDS COULD FIND SUBSTANTIAL JUSTIFICATION IN THE FACTS. WHILE GOE HAS ALLOCATED SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES FOR NEW HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE AND PATIENT CARE IN EXISTING FACILITIES ARE POOR. PUBLIC HOSPITALS, FOR EXAMPLE, BUDGET LESS THAN A DOLLAR A DAY PER PATIENT FOR FOOD AND MEDICINE COMBINED. COST OF MEDICINE IS, BY LOCAL STANDARDS EXHORBITANT, AND, IN FACT, A NUMBER OF MEDICATIONS SMUGGLED FROM COLOMBIA ARE REPORTEDLY AVAILABLE LOCALLY AT ABOUT HALF THE PREVAILING OFFICIAL PRICE. AND, WHILE MEDICAL PROFESSION IS BY NO MEANS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LADDER HERE (QUITE THE CONTRARY), ECUADOR HAS BEEN EXPERIENCING A SUBSTANTIAL MEDICAL "BRAIN DRAIN" OF BOTH DOCTORS AND NURSES IN RECENT YEARS.

4. DESPITE WHATEVER JUSTIFICATION FOREGOING GRIEVANCES MAY HAVE HELD, GOE REACTED SHARPLY AND BITTERLY TO THREATENED STRIKE. SECGEN FOR ADMINISTRATION GENERAL CARLOS AGUIRRE ANNOUNCED JANUARY 13 THAT GOE WOULD DO EVERYTHING NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER IN EVENT WALKOUT MATERIALIZED; AND ON JANUARY 14 GOVERNMENT PLACED HUGE PUBLIC ADVERTISEMENTS IN LOCAL PRESS DENOUNCING THREATENED STRIKE AS A POLITICAL CONSPIRACY AND EXPLAINING STEPS IT HAD ALREADY TAKEN TO MEET FEDERATION'S CONCERNS. TONE OF GOE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS ITSELF RATHER MENACING, POINTING OUT THAT UNDER PENAL CODE MEDICAL STRIKES ARE CONSIDERED ACTS OF "SABOTAGE AND TERRORISM" LIABLE TO ONE TO FIVE YEARS IMPRISONMENT.

5. THROUGHOUT PERIOD OF POLEMIC PUBLIC EXCHANGES, THREE JOINT COMMISSIONS COMPOSED OF HEALTH MINISTRY OFFICIALS AND MEDICAL FEDERATION HELD URGENT MEETINGS TO WORK OUT COMPROMISE. ON EVENING JANUARY 15, FEDERATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THAT STRIKE WAS OFF AND THAT SATISFACTION HAD BEEN ATTAINED ON TWO OF ITS THREE BASIC POINTS. ALTHOUGH FINAL DETAILS HAD NOT BEEN WORKED OUT, GOE AGREED TO WORK WITH FEDERATION ON FORMULATION OF A HIGHER BUDGET FOR HOSPITALS AND ON LOWERING OF PRICES FOR MEDICINES. MEANWHILE, DOCTORS SETTLED FOR A MUCH MORE MODEST RISE IN MINIMUM PAY THAN THEY ORIGINALLY DEMANDED. (NEW MINIMUM WILL BE

US \$240 PER MONTH.)

6. COMMENT: HAD IT TAKEN PLACE, MEDICAL STRIKE, IN ADDITION TO DISRUPTIVE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES, COULD HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL SET-BACK FOR RODRIGUEZ REGIME. DEFIANCE OF GOE BY MAJOR CIVILIAN PROFESSIONAL GROUP WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE CHARGED POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE AND THERE WERE ALREADY INDICATIONS THAT DOCTORS HAD MOBILIZED SUPPORT OF SOME OF THE REGIME'S MORE DEDICATED CIVILIAN OPPONENTS. FOR GOE, TIMING WOULD HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY INOPPORTUNE SINCE STRIKE WOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE ON EVE OF ITS THIRD ANNIVERSARY (FEBRUARY 15) AND THEREFORE COINCIDED WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF OPPOSITIONIST AGITATION THAT IS ALREADY EXPECTED FOR THAT OCCASION.
HEMENWAY

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